

24 March '53

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SECURITY INFORMATION

THE STALEMATE IN INDOCHINA

The conflict in Indochina, now in its seventh year, is still a stalemate. There is no prospect of an early military decision for the French Union forces -- or for the Communist-led Viet Minh barring large scale intervention by Communist China.

But this war is quite different from the stalemated war in Korea. The basic problem in Indochina is political -- the people remain largely apathetic -- and substantial progress towards a solution of the political problem seems to be a prerequisite for any real advance toward victory over Communism in that country. ^{Difficulty of} A reconciliation of the native people's nationalist aspirations with the realities of the French position at this time ~~seems impossible~~.

Tonkin, the northern province of Vietnam, is the area of major ~~military~~ activity, but there is sporadic guerrilla fighting throughout the rest of Vietnam and in the other Indochinese states of Laos and Cambodia. The French-led forces consist of some 195,000 Frenchmen, Foreign Legionnaires, ^{Moroccans, Senegalese, Fr. Afr.} Africans and Indochinese of the French regular army, plus various supplementary native formations, which include the 60 battalions of the Vietnam National Army. The over-all total of these forces

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is roughly 480,000. Opposing them are 300,000 regular and auxiliary troops of the Viet Minh.

The bulk of Viet Minh forces is now concentrated to the northwest and south of the French-held Tonkin delta, where they have been undergoing resupply and additional training for the past three months.

There are strong indications that *a new* ~~another~~ offensive will begin before the end of March.

25X1C8b ~~the attack will be directed against~~

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northern Laos; however, it is likely that at least a secondary effort will be made against the Tonkin Delta, ~~probably in the~~ ~~month~~. About six weeks of good campaigning weather remains before the rainy season hampers military operations.

~~The French are now providing a large part of the money and technical leadership necessary to withstand the Viet Minh. This war imposes a ^{heavy} painful burden on France. Minister for the Associated States Leterme on 16 December told the Atlantic Council that ~~France~~ ^{it} has ~~lost~~ ^{suffered} 90,000 ~~killed, wounded or missing~~ ^{casualties} from 1945 to October 1952. Moreover, he stated, ~~France has~~ 26 percent of its officer corps and 37 percent of its non-commissioned officer corps ^{is} in Indochina. ~~Other French officials~~ ^{The} ~~have claimed~~ ^{claim} that officer casualties ~~in Indochina~~ annually exceeds the number of St. Cyr graduates. From the financial~~

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standpoint Indochina accounts for a billion and a quarter dollars of the total French military budget of four billion dollars. ^{American} ~~United States~~ aid for the 1953 military effort in Indochina is expected to reach 777 million dollars, ~~of which 430 million dollars would be budgetary support.~~ The French claim that the Indochina war has cost them over four billion dollars since 1945. ~~For comparison, the total post-war American aid to France is in excess of seven billion.~~

receiving
The Viet Minh has been receiving aid from Communist China *in the form of* since early 1951. This assistance has included the training of whole units in China and Tonkin, the assignment of several thousand technical and military advisers, and the supplying of a wide variety of military materiel. It is estimated [REDACTED]

2000 new
[REDACTED] that during the last few months ^{the} Chinese have been shipping to the Viet Minh between 500 and 700 tons of supplies per month, *and there have recently been signs of* ~~indicating of a possible increase, in~~ supplies from China are recent reports of a marked acceleration of truck traffic on the Red River valley route into northwest Tonkin.

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American military aid in the past two years has remedied former French equipment deficiencies, but France cannot provide more troops and it has long been recognized by the French authorities that defeat of the Viet Minh is impossible without the activation of a strong native army.

Plans for the creation of such an army were first discussed almost five years ago. Since then, however, the French have moved erratically and hesitantly. They have been particularly slow in training native officers. At present, the army consists of 60 battalions, a large number of which are composed of Vietnamese transferred from the regular French forces. While the Vietnam Army has grown by these transfers, the French have continued to recruit Vietnamese troops into their own regular army. In fact, there are more Vietnamese troops in French uniform now than there were when the Vietnam Army was inaugurated.

Recently, French and Vietnamese officials agreed to increase the army by 54 light battalions (40,000 men) by the end of this year. Lack of fighting spirit among the rank and file and a strong aversion among educated Vietnamese to serve as officers in what they consider to be a more or less puppet army suggest that the army's capabilities will not necessarily increase in proportion to its numerical growth. The Vietnamese as a whole

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are not behind the army because they fear it is designed primarily to serve French interests. The French may view it apprehensively because it might, once firmly in Vietnamese hands, become a political instrument directed against French authority. The reputedly strongly pro-French prime minister of Vietnam himself hinted that the French feared the growing Vietnam Army no less than they feared the Viet Minh.

The failure of the French to proceed with all possible speed to develop a native army capable of defeating the Viet Minh may also stem from the expressed fear of the French that the defeat of the Viet Minh would provoke a Chinese Communist invasion.

The Vietnam Government is provisional and still in the formative stage. It is headed by Bao Dai, who as a quasi-monarchic chief of state, appoints the premier. There is no legislature. Competent administrators are scarce, and most government agencies are dependent on French advisers. Vietnam's international status is that of "independence within the French Union." This relation has been partially defined in a series of French-Vietnamese accords which confer on the French final authority in military matters and a veto power over decisions affecting their economic interests. No Asian

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state except Thailand has established diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

The present premier, Nguyen Van Tam, is a vigorous administrator and has initiated certain social and economic reforms. Last month, he authorized the election of municipal councilors throughout Vietnam. These elections provoked widespread popular interest and drew into political life certain able Vietnamese who had hitherto held aloof from participation in government. Another promising development was the appointment last November of Nguyen Huu Tri to the governorship of Tonkin. Tri is a nationalist who holds the respect of both the French and the Vietnamese people and has already made some progress in Tonkin toward reconciling French policy and Vietnamese nationalism.

Despite these favorable developments, however, the Vietnamese remain strongly resentful of French authority and influence. They are uncooperative with and suspicious of their government, which they consider to be composed largely of pro-French puppets. These attitudes are reflected in the Vietnam Army's low morale, and in the failure either to attract substantial numbers of defectors from the Viet Minh or to create a popular antagonism toward Ho Chi Minh's movement.

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The French, on their side, argue that if further political concessions were granted the Vietnamese at this time the National Assembly would then refuse to vote the credits necessary to maintain French forces in Indochina. The Minister for Associated States says that France's sacrifices must be compensated for by certain long-term special privileges in Indochina.

In this stalemated political and military situation, the current French course appears to be to hold on until the threat from the Viet Minh and from Communist China has been dispelled by some sort of over-all settlement in the Far East.

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